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# STEP LADDER

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# THE ORDER OF BOOKFELLOWS

*An International Association of Readers and Writers*

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# The STEP LADDER

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*I suggest that the only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little farther down our particular path than we have yet got ourselves. I suggest, furthermore, that when you feel that you could almost have written the book yourself — that's the moment when it's influencing you.*

A BOOK THAT INFLUENCED ME, by E. M. Forster

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GALESBURG, ILLINOIS

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Laura Eliza Bliven  
404 Riverside Drive  
New York 25, New York

## TO THE UNAWARE BELOVED

Unknown and all unknowable the way  
That Cæsar's legions took to bring them home,  
Although I lightly quote the old cliché —  
And wish it true that all roads lead to Rome —  
As Easter sun rolls back the Hudson mist  
And wakes New York to join in promenade.  
Alone I watch the couples pass, and twist  
My lips to smile and show a bright façade —  
And wonder at what altar you partake  
Of joy, aware that I shall never know  
A comparable completion. I make  
My offertory prayers for you, then go  
And gently light a taper from my heart  
For each slow mile that sets our paths apart.

William Means  
2013 North Knoxville Avenue  
Peoria, Illinois

### THE RED CABOOSE

Wouldn't you  
like to live  
in a Red Caboose  
                                at the end of the train  
that wanders,  
                    taking  
                                its  
  own  
  sweet  
  time  
Between the whispering crowds of grain  
towards  
                    the transient point  
  at the end of the line . . .

### THE BRIDGES

out of the rocks  
coal  
ore earth-stuff  
exploded  
pulled by force  
of men  
changed by sweat.  
A love  
and dreams



. . . and dreams became  
spider work  
girders  
oak plank floors  
to span Vermillion  
Kickapoo Creek and Spoon.  
The bridges stand now  
stark rusted brown  
grey  
hard  
crystal tempered  
memories  
of ice and rain  
wheel hoof  
patterns patterns  
life that passed along above  
on the road  
down the road  
into the mystery of time —  
better monuments  
perhaps  
bridges, the old bridges  
than steel scratched  
stones  
forgotten  
    forgotten  
in the old churchyards  
dead words  
    on yellowed paper  
    futile poems  
better witnesses  
perhaps  
of time itself  
of time's sweet  
bitter life's flow  
better to remember  
the life that passed below.

Mary Winter  
333 Crescent Drive  
Lake Bluff, Illinois

## PRELUDE

Go cold, in early April to the woods,  
Though but the tokens of upsurging green  
In groping fingers of pale shoots  
And studded branch, be seen.

Now, while the growing stir is suspirent  
Beneath brown leaves; where now most clearly show  
Hepatica and windflower  
In patches cool as snow,

Where some small creature, famished after sleep,  
Blinks in the sun, still drowsy from its lair;  
And falling fresh, since long unheard,  
The quick note flutes the air.

Go now, before the multiform design  
Shall merge the individual flower;  
Before the swelling symphony,  
The lone voice, overpower.

## THROUGH THE STEREOSCOPE

Time and I stood still;  
Space wove between  
The standing flowers  
And space and time and I  
Were one — fused with the scene.

A daisy field in which three children stood:  
It seemed as if I might  
Have waded through the froth of white  
To join them, if I would.  
My fingers could have girdled every stem  
That grew so close but still so clear, apart,  
Three dimensional, someone said —  
Words, meaningless to my young head  
Which yet, a fourth,  
Had dimly apprehended,  
Sure as the needle  
Swings to north.

John Allemande  
Box 238  
Narberth, Pennsylvania

### ON EVOLUTION

When laughter echoed under the apple tree  
she taught him what he would not know,  
yet man whose longing to return  
is cross of hers to grow  
the new, the strange, the wondrous flower  
warm with the moil of breathing swamp,  
saw her in posture she feared to take.  
Choose now, before the cycle ends —  
Madonna or the ape.

### ON THE MADONNA

When hunger sings in a heart's dark place  
and old men pluck on muted strings  
they dream of one who knew her way  
among the apple trees.

But youth, pursuer, who empties himself to woo,  
youth, the bold, whose heart on a mossy stone  
is sold when the bid is low  
still seeks the one whose blossoms bloom in snow  
whose fallen angel voice  
can lure the smaller angels from their cloudy spheres.

Helen Harrington  
Lamoni, Iowa

## THE HUNTED

The last of the enemy was on the run. Over the wastes of half a world, he wandered, friendless and afraid.

Once there had been thousands — Once there had been millions of the Enemy — big men, little men, scampering for shelter — all legitimate prey because all were wicked. Now there was only this one left, and the Director of the Universe drew the lines tight around him. The Armies of the Universe — its navies and air flotillas — closed on him. Soon they would get him, and half of the world's humanity, long denominated by the other half as "Evil," would become extinct. Only the half of humanity known as "Good" would persist, triumphant.

It had not been easy. It had not been easy or comfortable or edifying to reduce a hemisphere to rubble. It had — particularly at first, in the early stages of the attack — aroused the opposition of some of the "Good" people. But, lately, the opposition had crumbled.

There was not a soul, now, who would speak up against total annihilation of the Enemy. Even the last man must die. The Director, the Directorate, and the populace, the various services that affected the thinking and acting and being of the populace, were all in agreement. Those who once had claimed this straggler was, at worst, a half-hearted foe, those who had said he was, at least, as much for the Good Side as for the Evil Side and might be valuable as a critique, had been shouted down, forced out to the Enemy to be destroyed, or had

simply faded away.

Now the great armadas set out to comb the seas; planes screamed down the sky; and soldiers marched into the last hiding places — the holes of the earth. He was on the run. Official Statement had confirmed the rumor. His tracks had been seen in the desert, and they were the bleeding tracks of a weary animal, despairing and lost.

The Director of the Universe stood on a peak above the desert and looked down at what had once been green and fertile prairie but was now molten rock, ash, and poisoned streams. As a boy he had vacationed here and he had loved this land as though it were his own. Only gradually had he learned to see that it was inferior, inferior as its people were inferior, and when — eventually — the Enemy had accused his land of the vicious qualities *they* possessed, when the Enemy had attempted, even, to preempt to itself the sacred title "Good," he had realized they had passed beyond all bounds into presumption.

He set his chin sternly and turned to his aide.

"The circle narrows!" He pointed to planes, hovering like hawks to swoop, to the navy, guarding the coast, to the armies, tightening the ring. "I will go down now. I wish to see him taken from his hiding place."

"But the danger!" exclaimed the aide. "The danger to you — to the country! When he dies, he may try to take us with him!"

"How could he take us with him?"



The Director scoffed. "We are sponsored by Good. Divinity itself stands with us. Perceiving iniquity of all those who stand against us, we destroy all Evil. What should we fear?"

Having the Old Faith put to him that way, the aide could see how foolish his fears had been. Good was successful. Evil's hemisphere was a desolation. The bones of Evil's wicked bleached in the cinders of their cities. A holy crusade had lowered these impertinent shrines to Evil's Protector — to whom Evil had impiously attributed goodness! In this last kill of one rather lukewarm foe, of course there could be no danger. The Director, his aide and his guard, went down into the desert. A soldier pointed out a track.

"See! The fugitive stepped heavily here. He fell! Here he dragged himself up again. He hides, now, yonder in the foxes' hole."

An inexplicable sense of urgency impelled the Director forward. He began to hear, as though they were present voices, ancient warnings, "Judge not that ye be not judged,"—"Love thine enemy"—and what was that about brotherly love and entertaining angels unawares?

All — all the men who had cried these things were gone, yet the very hills, the planes humming above, the clatter of steel, seemed to echo their cries.

The tumult increased and it seemed to the Director that those about him must hear. When the stones heard,

when the buzzards drooping on barren stems heard — he himself could not even see for the sound. It deadened all his other senses, and he staggered forward blindly, top-heavy, feeling nothing, almost falling.

What were these blurred forms lurching beside him? Were they the ages of man, or his own people passing. Did they remind him that they, too, could die, could be pressed into strata in frescoes mysterious and pathetic as the remains of the Paleolithic man? Was their screaming, "Save us — We perish" or was there another, stranger instruction?

In any case, it was too late to do anything now. A shout had gone up from the caves ahead. It was the shout that announced the kill.

A buzzard lifted his head in a show of interest. A soldier leaped upon a mound and brandished the flag of Good in a victory sign.

It was over. The era of charity toward the enemy was ended. The last man of the Enemy was dead, his influence void. A guard came shouting to the Director.

"The man is dead! Our Holy Hate has destroyed him! We are safe from him and from his kind forever!"

The guard pointed downward. "See! All that is left of him is this track in dust. His footprints — clear still, but soon to fade. Anyone can see by them that he was some kind of queer animal. In the center of each foot is a mark — like that of a nail."

Vera T. Marshall  
Box 711  
Brookhaven, Mississippi

### ANSWERED PRAYER

Do not doubt that prayers  
Are answered. Not with misgiving,  
But with certitude did I pray to God:  
This will I have —  
A son — even as You.

And so it was:  
Sweet beyond telling  
Was my answered prayer.

He stayed such a little while.  
O, God, why did I not pray:  
This will I have — and keep.

### BRIDGE TO SUMMER *Van Gogh's "Sunflowers"*

How could he birth a token sun, who knew  
No climate but despair? On somber days,  
The mind's November, his magic color lays  
A bridge to summer. I'm mesmerized by blue  
Of sky and sea together, infinite view.  
I taste the wind, so faintly salt, that sways  
The gilded censers. A breath of sandal stays  
On sun-warmed air long after night is due.

Yesterday, an icy hate had locked  
All love outside. In agony of cold  
I beat my hands and blew on fingers numb,  
Disused. The Flowers, sun-embodied, mocked  
The ice and warmed the heart enough to hold  
One drop of wine; of wafer, just one crumb.

Margaret Ross  
1 Huntly Road  
Richmond, Virginia

### RECALL

It may not be as I remember it —  
What things are? —  
Seldom real are thoughts recurring,  
And recollections far  
From actuality —

But since one island stands alone in memory,  
The rising rock, the lessening sand, the form  
Of sacred ruin — since I recall  
A brief hour spent where once in sun and storm  
Columba walked and spoke, and all  
Who heard were silenced into prayer —

Then to Iona I must go  
And linger there.

### DIRGE FOR OUR DAY

Have no pity for the Old!  
Weep if you weep for the Young!  
They who number many years  
Do not need our tears;  
Their memories are strong;  
Their loves are told.

Wrap your compassion around the Young  
Their days and nights will always be  
Snatched in brief uncertainty,  
Their songs unsung.

Weep, if you weep, for the Young!

Jocelyn Macy Sloan  
1250 East Avenue  
Rochester 10, New York

### SO GREEN MY THOUGHTS

I might have been a million years away  
last night.  
For in my dream, still trailing when I waked.  
there seemed to be a moth of memory.  
Yet, as it would unfurl, the wings dissolved.  
And I was left in wonder. Had I been — ?  
Where *had* I been?  
I could not shape the answer, could not fix  
my finite mind upon the time, or place.  
So green — my ancient thoughts,  
so swift to fade.

### CAPTIVE

Never mind, dear;  
you will grow used to being a captive  
after a while.  
It is a gradual process,  
almost beyond notice,  
with just this barest,  
subtle difference;  
birds do not sound quite as sweetly  
to your ears,  
the sun seems less warm  
upon your shoulders,  
the play of light, of shadow  
is less poignant to your eyes,  
while rapture fails to ring  
its golden bells  
within your heart.  
Such a little change —  
you only are diminished.



Emilie Glen  
28 East 10th Street  
New York, New York

## MAU

Mau, Goddess, Mouser,  
Most High of the Sapphire rule,  
Masked Mau sacred of Siam,  
Stare with the sapphire eyes of the East,  
Stare depths of blue ocean between,  
Leap, hell spitting on the backs of altar thieves,  
Mau, Goddess Mau,  
Crook tailed, bansheed, high sniffing.

Worshipped from dawning, were you?  
We'll not worship — wonder,  
Princess Sapphira, we'll call you,  
It's proper for your pedigree,  
Along with your honorable ancestors,  
King Rama, Manchu, Ching Sen,  
Sapphira, you're old, pyramids old,  
Can't fool us with dancing paws,  
Spins, pas de chats, grand jetés,  
Old as the cat cult of Europe  
That roused Christendom to drive cats out  
Only to call them back against plague,  
Old as Egypt's first granaries,  
Eyes staring blue at Creation.

No milk? What then? Cream?  
Cream with rubies? Diamond fish balls?  
Who are you to put on airs?  
One night with a back-fence Tom  
And your young will be alley cats,  
What good are you? No mice to catch,  
Our grain won't foul, we'll have bread,  
So mind your stare, none of your sniff,  
You can't control us with a whisker flick,  
Scat — no graven image here,  
Staring beyond us in sapphire disdain,  
A trick to win our worship,  
We'll not bow down to your cat rule,  
Mau, Goddess of the Sapphire stare.

Adelaide Long Lawson  
807 Auburn Avenue  
Monroe, Louisiana

### FOOTFALL OF SPRING

These petaled stars of dogwood point each spire  
Of clustered beauty, lifted to the light.  
With crimson centers crossed on virgin white  
They bless the forest temples, catching fire  
From sunset windows Gothic flames. As lyre  
Of wind and thrush proclaim their psalm, the blight  
Of day retreats to glades of dream . . . in flight  
Like birds that fade into the Great Entire.

Spring walks the dim cathedral forest-hall,  
As one with fern and frond. Her April feet  
Jewel the shadowed way, her figure tall  
Beside each brother tree. She feels the beat  
That is the heart of earth, her soft footfall  
Pulsing the dark, where earth and heaven meet.

Dorothy Randolph Byard  
Silvermine  
Norwalk, Connecticut

### EDGE OF SPRING

Here the arbutus hides among dead leaves  
While snow still lingers and the boughs are bare.  
Secret and low it blooms; a perfume weaves  
Its pungent sweetness through the chilly air.  
Long have we waited till this rosy flower  
That lies along the very edge of Spring  
In all the coverts, consecrates this hour  
With such immaculate, fragrant offering.

Lay by the brittle quilt of last November,  
Bend deep the knee and bow the head to know  
This incense; bid the too-avid hand remember  
That taking is not keeping. May-flowers grow  
Best in the wood lot, down beside the brook.  
Bring memory home with never a backward look.

Willis Eberman  
11015 N.W. Copeland Street  
Portland 1, Oregon

### PREMATURE SPRING

The earth is remembering spring: chickadees cry  
Over the field, over the fading snow; and juncos  
Twitter and peck where the crumbs are thrown;  
Yet there is an ominous sky.  
Though the iris shoots are lifting, and the buds  
Of the willow appear; and though  
The apple branches are freed from the weight of  
the snow,  
It is yet too soon to determine if winter is over.  
The time of year is treacherous. I have seen it  
before:  
The young buds frozen; the bushes encased again  
In beautiful, killing ice; and at the door,  
New drifts to cover the crumbs.  
The earth is remembering spring; but the birds  
Have gone from the field. There is a strain,  
Under the grey, under the pregnant sky;  
The silence, perhaps, before new snowfall comes.

Jimm Dakin  
Locust Hill Farm  
North Rochester, Massachusetts

### THOUGHTS ARE LOVERS

Off this sea-smoothed ledge are rimmed  
misty isles beyond  
the log of paraphrase.  
Memories respond  
as tender as a fern's clenched hand  
unfolds into a frond.

This day my lot is lonesomeness;  
with mind tiptoeing  
down thoughts that ring the world,  
unchecked, as breezes lowing  
o'er sea and sail; with wave washed rocks  
in ebb tide growing.

J. Phoenix  
Berwick-on-Tweed, England

### BLUE DANUBE

It holds no remembered associations:  
We never have lived to its strains together;  
Yet it is yours and yours alone.  
Always I danced it with reservations,  
No part of its splendidly love-sunned weather  
Away from you who comprise my own.

We never shall dance to its brilliant measures.  
Yet now we embody the dream they express  
And life is its passion of rhythm come true;  
That I always left folded, a plighted pleasure,  
Like an uncut book or an unworn dress  
Only to read or to wear for you.

Ryah Tumarkin Goodman  
15 Hancock Road  
Brookline, Massachusetts

### THIS COOL CONTENT

This cool content is softer than the down  
Upon the ripened thistle flower and wears  
The same deceptive silken crown  
Of purple buds above thin thistle hairs.

Yet have I stroked the thistle thorn,  
Shielded the bristling in my heart  
With smooth soothsayings born  
Of the need to couch with epigrams the needled dart.

These feathered phrases, brief as breath,  
Puffed into a velvet panoply of wit,  
Harbor a cool content beneath  
A facile alphabet.



Douglas R. Empringham  
119 East Poplar  
San Mateo, California

### TIMOROUS

Above me are  
    Butterfly wings  
Stained by centuries  
    Of floral embrace  
About me are  
    Darting threads of light  
That pierced  
    The Spanish moss sky  
To plunge their needles  
    Into earth  
Beyond me you soar,  
    Tetherless  
Across the time trapped sky  
It is I reposing,  
    Who falter.

Charline Brown  
Edgewater Gardens, Route 3  
Monroe, Louisiana

### THE INCA AWAITS HIS RANSOM

While bearers filled a room with gold, and one  
With silver twice, the Inca sat, ill-starred.  
This captive king, descendent of the Sun,  
Now for diversion called his Spanish guard.

"Write your name for God upon my nail."  
The soldier wrote; and Atahualpa showed  
His finger to those who passed in shining mail,  
Amazed that from each throat a "Dios" flowed.

Pizarro walked into his prisoner's cell.  
The Inca raised the script before his eyes.  
It brought no sound, yet the Conqueror heard a knell  
For him who bared a fault such silence implies.

Pizarro watched the face, no more abstruse,  
Whose lip rose in a sneer, curved like a noose.

Jeannette Chappell  
160 East 72nd Street  
New York 21, New York

### SHADOWED WATER

Daily he had watched her flit  
through eucalyptus, twined with mist;  
pause before flame flowers,  
crystal-tipped;  
then, fleet as dappled doe,  
mount cypress-fringed escarpment of the sea.

He followed, and surprised her  
on the crest.  
She turned.  
He caught her in his arms . . .  
Below, the shadowed water  
barely breathed.

The sun bestrode the mountain  
as they dove.

Warren Kliever  
321 Orchard  
Topeka, Kansas

### PASTORAL

More soothing than breeze that teases soft-waved hair,  
Sweeter than spiced air honey-heavy flowers,  
Blue bees and golden birds of autumn bear,  
Were my too short, too shy spring hours;

Love grows like red spring fires in white roots,  
Like nectar-nascence of nasturtium buds,  
Like virile vigor of green calla rage,  
Like hyacinths piled high in sweet decay.

But now I see the dead and dry trees bend,  
Where, out in the field, odd fragments of wet wind  
Rip up torn leaves, rattling in setting sun,  
Sinking. I hear the winter coming on.

My flocks are gone, my walls are broken down,  
The gray sky gathers clouds and I have no roof.  
In grief, waist-high like thistles, I am alone;  
I had never thought life so aloof.

Margie B. Boswell  
2033 Wilshire Boulevard  
Fort Worth 10, Texas

## WORDS ARE AS BLOSSOMS

Words are the blossoms of a chosen thought,  
As are the waving blooms in garden urns.  
The empty word has roots like those of ferns  
That flourish when the current hour is fraught

With kind attention, but if days are wrought  
Of sheer forgetfulness and suntime burns,  
The tender plant soon disappears. It learns  
Too late the need of anchorage when caught

In winds of chance. But words that superpose  
Their roots on faith, deep in a soil of worth,  
Arise to flourish like the woodland rose,

Full-armed for meeting tragedy or mirth  
And braced with courage, mock the overflows  
Of fallacies that might intern the earth.

Musee A. Brahms  
335 Hinsdale Street  
Brooklyn 7, New York

## ABIDING IN OBSCURENESS

If love cannot find me and fame desists  
From blaring forth to trumpet my acclaim,  
Thus growing silver pated while my flame  
Burns low, abiding in obscureness' lists;  
I'd like a cottage small to be my own  
With airy windows gazing east and west,  
To view sun rise and set in glowing tone  
With music's exultation for my guest,  
Fond casement flow'rs beguiled by winter sun.  
Here I would sit with all my loves, dear books  
That breathe romance, to weep when love was won  
And sigh at poet's verse of sylvan nooks;  
And when my mortal frame is snatched from me  
To peek at bards of immortality.

Dora M. Pettinella  
29 Washington Square  
New York 11, New York

## LE DORMEUR DU VAL

By ARTHUR RIMBAUD

C'est un trou de verdure, où chante une rivière  
Accrochant follement aux herbes des haillons  
D'argent, où le soleil, de la montagne fière,  
Luit. C'est un petit val qui mousse de rayons.

Un soldat jeune, bouche ouverte, tête nu  
Et la nuque baignant dans le frais cresson bleu,  
Dort; il est étendu dans l'herbe, sous la nue,  
Pâle dans so lit vert où la lumière pleut.

Les pieds dans la glaieuls, il dort. Souriant comme  
Sourirait un enfant malade, il fait un somme.  
Nature, berce-le chaudement: il a froid!

Les parfums ne font pas frissonner sa narine;  
Il dort dans le soleil, la main sur sa poitrine,  
Tranquille. Il a deux trous rouges au côté droit.

## SLEEPING IN THE VALLEY

A TRANSLATION

A hole of green, where wildly sings the river  
Caught on the grass, bright with silver tatters.  
Beyond the mountainside, the sun shines brighter.  
Within the valley vivid sunshine shatters.

A young soldier, open-mouthed, with naked head  
And sturdy nape of neck, in blue cress bathing,  
Sleeps, outstretched upon the grass, under a cloud,  
Pale on his green bed where the light is streaming.

His feet in sword-grass, he sleeps. He reposes,  
Smiling, as an ailing infant smiles. He just dozes!  
O Nature! Rock him with warmth, he is so cold!

The perfumes bring no quiver to his nostril,  
He sleeps beneath the sun, peaceful and tranquil —  
On his right side, two blood-red holes gleam bold.



## PEACHES GRAY GREEN

Peaches are gray-green, yet summer is here;  
They are pockmarked and round-small, imperfect this year.  
Like marbles they roll on the grassless plot,  
Unwanted, unharmed, unable to rot.  
So hard and unripe is each stony ball,  
That only squirrels will gather them all.  
The storms have wreaked havoc, all fruits are like bone  
On branches where winter has lingered alone.  
The storm-bit peaches are false as fruit,  
Yet earth will reclaim them in grass and root.

Orma McCormick  
1558 W. Hazelhurst Street  
Ferndale 20, Michigan

## DOUZET ON DEATH

Is death an ebon scythe, or is it bat-like  
With talons hard and cold as anthracite?  
Is death a midnight plume to ease the plight  
Of mouse-born flesh, when pain is cruelly cat-like?

The Reaper may not be a Stygian thief;  
A rest from anguish, like a mercy crescent,  
May moon-pool sleep, if woe is too incessant,  
And bring a dying soul sincere relief.

Is death worn daily, round the neck, cravat-like,  
Or does it hover over heads in flight?  
Is death a man who stands by, acquiescent,  
Till human spirits call for him in grief?

Joan Angevine Swift  
3314 East 123rd Street  
Seattle 55, Washington

## BLACK RIVER

How soft is your going, black river,  
How silent your water.  
You glide in middle age past the greening corn,  
The reaper, the silo waiting,  
Heedless of your heritage,  
Forgetting you are the upland's daughter.

Once you were merry, black river.  
Once on a mountain  
Your froth and your foam  
Were like petticoats flying  
In a young girl's dance,  
And the sound of your singing  
Played in the tops of the tallest trees  
Like children in a fountain.

But slow is your going, black river,  
And slower tomorrow.  
You move like an old heart beating  
Through the dreaming loam,  
The cane and the cotton.  
Softly you flow and surely,  
South to the sea and to sorrow.

Leona Hamilton  
1217 South Kennedy  
Tyler, Texas

## TO FRIENDS, WELL MEANING

Do not despair  
That sound has closed around me like a dark  
Mantilla falling softly on my head.  
Or that I miss some of the town's small-talk  
In moments that my lowered eyes betray.  
Reproach me not  
If I should sometimes choose to walk apart  
Through corridors where truth and beauty meet,  
And listen for a haunting melody  
Bringing the sea's prophetic undertone.  
Nor marvel that I go serene and proud,  
Guided by voices that you do not know.

Paula Nelson  
46 East 91st Street  
New York 28, New York

## IN DEDICATION

Being a simple man, and slow to anger,  
Soft-spoken, shy and undemonstrative,  
He stood apart from crowds, their transient clangor,  
Without reproach, with nothing much to give.

That is how many would have judged him — choosing  
The middle course, the safe indifference,  
Beyond the need of gaining or of losing  
What others might have thought of consequence.

But those who came to him bewildered, harried  
By sorrow or uncertainty, were shown  
A way to lift the burdens that they carried,  
Found bread where once had been a stone.

One of the quiet people, never caring  
How many passed him by without a word;  
Yet some of us were richer in the sharing  
Of what his gentle kindness conferred. . . .

William Allen Ward  
P. O. Box 4282, Station A  
Dallas, Texas

## DESERT LINES

By the dry creek  
The mesquite crouches  
Like a fugitive hiding from  
The sheriff's posse.

The sandstorm  
Crawls upon its belly across  
The wasteland like a hungry monster,  
Feeding upon the gravel.

Mile-high — a buzzard  
Soars, watching — ever watching,  
The dying steer at the dry  
Water hole.

Laura Eliza Bliven  
404 Riverside Drive  
New York 25, New York

## THE FIFTY-CENT PIECE

Mrs. Yancey, a small figure tired-looking in shabby black, set a gallon glass jug under the spigot of the artesian well in the center of Pioneers' Park. Taking Mrs. Donovan some water would be a good excuse for going there earlier than usual.

While the jug was filling, Mrs. Yancey took a crumpled handkerchief from her worn handbag and wiped away the drop of moisture that trembled on the tip of her wind-reddened nose. There was a wintry edge to the wind brazenly scavenging among the trees that gray October morning. She wished she needn't stay where it was cold in winter. California . . .

She guessed Debby had said to get a can of blue plums. They'd be from California. Prob'ly she better look at the list, get it fixed in her mind so she wouldn't forget anything. Lard and yeast—she'd have to have them for bread tomorrow—would be sixteen cents. Then nineteen cents for a package of frozen carrots and peas. It was a good thing Debby always remembered to look for specials in the paper at the library. Even crippled as she was, Debby was more help than a lot of people's daughters who were all right. Thirty-eight cents for a little package of green tea. Tea went a lot farther, but she wished coffee would come down so they could afford it again. She sort of missed her coffee. And a big can of the plums would be thirty. Mrs. Yan-

cey counted up, using her fingers and moving her lips. Ninety—Ninety-three and . . . She was forgetting the half pound of pork liver. Twenty cents. That made a dollar thirteen. With three cents more for the tax, a dollar sixteen.

Even if Mrs. Donovan didn't buy cookies or doughnuts as she usually did Fridays, she'd be sure to pay the fifty cents owing from last week. The old lady was likely to be forgetful about some things, but never about debts. Mrs. Donovan always paid her debts. Without fail.

Water was streaming down the sides of the jug. Mrs. Yancey shifted the market basket containing her homemade cookies and doughnuts in a couple of old cracker cans to her left arm so she could pick up the jug with her right hand. The slow tolling of St. Patrick's big bell came beating down on the gusty wind as she scuffed on through sodden leaves cater-corner across the block square park.

Halfway along the next block west on Third Street she climbed to the porch of a square frame house painted gray. She knocked, then opened the glass-paneled door a crack and called, "Oo-hoo! Mrs. Donovan! It's me. Mrs. Yancey."

"Come in."

Carefully, Mrs. Yancey closed the outside door, then pushed open one to her right across the narrow hall from



the foot of the stairs. The living room, with the shades two-thirds drawn, was dim. Mrs. Donovan, a plump, jovial figure of an old lady, was in the big leather rocker where she oftenest sat.

"I brought you some artesian water," Mrs. Yancey told her. "I know you like it and I thought your brother'd be too busy to get any."

"Yes, he always is," Mrs. Donovan agreed, smiling. "It's nice of you to think of it."

"I'll just take it out and empty it so you can have the jug. I've got to get some water for ourselves, going back."

The old lady nodded. "Put it in that little chest that's on the bottom shelf of the pantry."

Mrs. Yancey went between the golden oak pillars of the arch separating living room from dining room. As she turned toward the kitchen she noticed that the studio couch where Mrs. Donovan had slept of late was gone from a corner of the dining room. Watching the water splash into the kettle, Mrs. Yancey decided that the old lady must have got enough better to climb the stairs again. Maybe Doc Marshall was doing her some good after all. She wouldn't want him to doctor a sick chicken for her, but . . .

With the empty jug, she went back to the living room and sat down. "Are you feeling better, Mrs. Donovan? I believe you're looking better."

"Oh, yes, I'm a lot better now." The old lady took up a small coin purse that lay in her ginghamed lap. "I knew you'd come this morning, so I've been waiting."

"My, it seems quiet in here, in spite

of the wind. The house is still as . . . " Mrs. Yancey caught herself. Mrs. Donovan was very sensible about dying, but . . . To cover her confusion, she asked, sooner than she had meant to, "Would you like some cookies or doughnuts?"

"I don't know as I would, now. It's fifty cents I owe you, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right." She laughed, embarrassedly, "My, I'm so glad you're feeling better."

"Oh, my heart don't bother me at all now," Mrs. Donovan smiled, opened the little purse.

"Thank you." Mrs. Yancey carefully stowed the coin in her own purse. The old lady's fingers had been cold. "D'you suppose the furnace needs fixing? Seems like it's not very warm in here. Maybe I better . . ."

"I'm all right," Mrs. Donovan assured her, "but you can look at the fire if you want. They likely didn't think of it 'fore they left."

"I'll go do that, then. And I guess I'll just go on out the side entry door. Is there anything else I can do for you? Or get you? A glass of water, maybe?"

"No, thank you." Mrs. Donovan continued to smile gently, pleased. "I'm really perfectly comfortable."

Mrs. Yancey laid the jug in the basket and got up. She went through the dining room and kitchen and down into the basement. The fire seemed all right. Funny the house was so sort of chilly. Must be the wind. She called up the stairs. "The fire's all right, Mrs. Donovan. I'm going now. Goodbye!"

Thinly the old lady's cheery accents floated down to her, "Goodbye, Mrs. Yancey!"

Mrs. Yancey climbed the backyard that sloped up to the paved alley. The gray clouds seemed to have grown darker. Her footsteps echoed from the walls of the sheds and garages as she went on to the farther end of the block. Slowly, she climbed the street grade, went into the new brick building on the corner by way of a side door. She told the lone butcher, "I'll take half a pound of pork liver, Mr. Holzer."

He slid open a door of the ice counter. "Windy, this morning."

"Cold, too," she returned, getting out her handkerchief. As she was wiping moisture from her nose again, she saw, through the front display windows, the white-flagged cars that were parked solidly along the curbs in both directions from the towering pile of St. Patrick's across the way. "Looks like a big funeral. Whose is it, d'you know?"

Holzer smacked the paper tray of liver on the scale, squinted nearsightedly at what was registered. "'Tis pretty big," he conceded, "bigger than most." He slapped a rectangle of oiled paper over the liver, tore wrapping paper from a roll beneath the counter with a sharp, rasping sound. "Seems kind of funny for . . ."

Mrs. Yancey put in, "Couldn't you let me have just a bit of suet to fry it in?"

"Sure." He scooped up a knife from a block, disappeared into the walk-in refrigerator. Coming back with a chunk of creamy fat cupped in his huge red paw, he thrust it on top of the tray and deftly folded and tucked the wrapper about the whole. "She was always so cheerful," he pursued, "that it seems kind of funny, don't it, for Mrs. Donovan to be getting buried on a dismal day like this?"

Rose Myra Phillips  
707 Park Boulevard  
Attica, Indiana

## WHILE WRITING A LETTER

This where the pen speaks  
Testified of a tree  
Water-marked by rain,  
Mossed initially.

Once it knew the sun,  
Now mere warmth of my flesh.  
Spring following spring  
It shook out the fresh  
Green of the leaf  
From a brown chrysalis,  
But never, O never  
A white leaf like this!

Bernice Ames  
12223 Dunoon Lane  
Los Angeles 49, California

### THEY CALL IT GOLD MOUNTAIN

Because it will buy an expensive dream of beyond?  
Or once lashed man's ambition to his success?  
Surely no minds can tarnish this jewel  
Nor elements pilfer this coin of the earth.

Orange and ochre  
Leaning toward sun  
It waits the century through,  
Veins of quartz running to a secret heart.

Guard to the valley below  
It watches trees avenged by fire's tongue,  
Twisted by bad tempered wind;  
Shrugging the softness of rain  
It witnesses greedy waters plunging beyond their beds,  
Meadows parched golden and hills breaking green,  
Men-hewn structures leveled to earth.

Bright hope, this mountain  
Wedges the lowly and mighty  
In silence grown brittle  
Where rock bounced on rock speaks from a shallow pallet  
And the grey-green sage like an army of porcupines  
Advances to stipple the gold.

Ella Elizabeth Preston  
1322 East Twelfth Street  
Davenport, Iowa

### WITH BLUEBELLS AND BUTTERCUPS FOR BREAD

Down from flowered heights the cattle go,  
One hoof and then another striking  
    the rain wet rocks.  
Head down, with twitching hide,  
Down from the mountain side,  
From the growl of thunder and lightning shocks,  
Scraping their wet flanks under  
The leaning spruce and pine,  
Swaying, with heavy udders ——  
Following their life's design ——  
Down from flowered heights the cattle go  
To their mountain milking.

What liquor must be theirs  
Who have fed on mountain flowers,  
Who have browsed through summer showers  
With bluebells and buttercups for bread!

### MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Once more mine whistles shake the Arapahoes  
And man, the mighty midget, burrows down  
To seek for gold. Now, Ward, the little town,  
Shrunk to ten, at last to thirty grows.  
The old frame school, abandoned all these years,  
Its twelve foot ceiling hung with webs of dust,  
Will soon be echoing children's happy cheers,  
So, since a winter is coming, parents must  
Lower its ceiling to a less chilly height,  
Then insulate the walls and chink the doors  
That small feet may find comfort on these floors  
And tiny hands be not too stiff to write.  
Although the bluebirds will be back in spring  
A mountain school should be a cosy thing.

Lucy Price  
2610 Edgehill Road  
Cleveland Heights 6, Ohio

### SEA CERTAINTY

It is  
With reverence  
The sea respects the shore  
And rebels only occasionally  
In anger,  
Or else  
Coily recedes  
To contemplate confined  
Constancy, when it could inundate  
The earth.

### NOTICE THE NIGHT

Mother Nature's child who walks with dewy feet  
Descends devotedly. His aura of mystery  
And melodrama is everywhere. See  
Him surround the moon, engulf the street.

He is the nebulous companion of capricious seas,  
As he conducts the waters to quench thirsty beaches.  
Quietly he reigns and softly reaches,  
Beguiling lovers, consoling the lonely to ease.

He stalks the sky with cool benevolence  
Keeping shadowed watch in purpled grey,  
Blanketing the heads of sleepers while dreams spawn.

Observing man's reaction to his opaque presence  
Shyly he departs giving way  
To the clatter and dissonance of dawn.

Marguerite W. Truslow  
15-A Locust Drive  
Summit, New Jersey

## GIRL AT THE CLAVICORD

*How many miles to Babylon?*  
She sings in twilight of the hills  
for whom the Past is only pageantry:  
folk song and child and tender hour one.

*Three score miles and ten.* As near  
as is adventure or romance  
for whom the world is lilac-fresh,  
the high road easy and the sign-posts clear.

*When shall I get there?* Long, long pause,  
while Babylon, eons removed,  
burns in my thought. May she not learn  
too late its old perpetuating flaws.

*There and back again.* Quick notes chime —  
May she not feel guilty dismay  
at the blood's cargo, burdening the stream  
from our slow journey through infected time.

And she inheritor of all  
the gardens of Semiramis,  
goblets of gold, the faience-crust'd throne,  
toil of the slave beside the hidden well.

*If your heels are nimble and light.*  
Daughter of dusk and flame, mischance  
and chance! May she divine old torturings  
nor take them for her private circumstance.

*You'll be back by candlelight.*

Darkness mutes mortal music now  
and thrush with his immortal note  
replies to danger and to doubt  
from his deep-hidden bough.

Dear Traveler, be home before the night.



## UNPUBLISHED ITEM

Palace conspiracies uncoil  
in other, narrower corridors,  
fomenting silent wars,  
dividing richer spoil.

The busy malcontents of mind  
huddle alike and plot.  
King Reason nods at that,  
with poppy he is wined.

Judges are only empty wigs  
and ceremonial gowns,  
constable ruminates and frowns,  
but then takes to his legs.

Saddest of all, the bells and cap  
are swept into a bin;  
Humor, the jester, pulls his cape  
around his trembling chin.

Anna M. Priestley  
3105 Fifth Avenue  
San Diego 3, California

## LAST STAND

The house was long ago consumed by fire,  
The garden is a mass of tangled weeds.  
Who knows what high hopes perished in that pyre,  
What blooms once sprang from tended plants and seeds?  
Protected on this southward-looking slope  
From winter's wrath and fickle ways of spring,  
Some orchard trees have not abandoned hope,  
The birds still gather here to nest and sing.

Now there is nothing but these gnarled old trees  
To show where love once bloomed and bore its fruit.  
There is a note of sadness in the breeze,  
As if it mourned for those who here took root.  
It almost seems to breathe a little prayer  
That all have found new happiness elsewhere.

Rachel Graham  
3 Griffin Road  
Clinton, New York

### THERE TO BE KNOWN

Why waste moon  
on the deep woods path  
when you know  
but a few bars can pass?  
Why heat stars  
to such white shining  
when eye shells  
are translucent only,  
against clear sight?  
Why sunglories  
when we-so-many  
are too pygmied  
for perception?  
But we give high thanks  
your generosity  
remains unblunted  
in all these thousands  
of earth pages.  
Violence into splendor  
may yet toss meteors  
into the black profundity

### DARK DYLAN

"Do not go gentle into that good night"—  
Bittered words he penciled with a hand  
Relying only on his own hot sight,  
Yet called death good in paradoxical stand.

Missing is a confidence of good  
For seekers in his tragic, raging lines.  
Concentric circles of his own selfhood,  
These poems in his troubled, dark designs.

Phyllis Hanson  
708 Steckley Gardens  
Norfolk 7, Virginia

### WITHOUT FAREWELL

We did not know our journey was completed,  
Until its sudden ending where we stood;  
The path that always rose  
To hills beyond the turning  
Was not obscured, but simply fell away,  
Sharp in the sounding vision of the wood.

This was what neither earth nor heaven sought,  
The heart exiled for what we did not know.  
Lost from ourselves, but hand in hand,  
We clung together,  
Compelled and solitary  
As shadows raveling thin across a shadowland.

Of what disaster was this imminence  
Of voices unreplying?  
Between some soft protest and dying,  
Lay meaning unexplored.  
For even breath,  
Transparent now outside of death,  
Contrived our deprivation.

And going on, we comforted each other,  
"We can come back again," we said,  
"It's only for awhile."  
But in the dark reserve of will,  
The secret fugitives of thought  
Escaped the anguished moment,  
That grew irrevocably still.

## BOOKFELLOW NOTES

### BOOKS RECEIVED

• *The Lyre and the Crown*; new translations from the Greek, by Marguerite Stevens Foster, New York, Vantage Press, Inc., 120 W. 31 Street, \$2.50. Translations from Euripides, Sophocles, Alcman and others with explanatory notes on facing pages.

• *Why I Came*, and other poems; by Justo P. Tolentino, published by the author, Castañeda Residence, Imus, Cavite, Philippine Islands. Lyric, patriotic verse by co-founder of Poetry, Inc. For further information write Ruth Cleaves Hazelton, Cirencester Literary Agency, South P. O., Niagara Falls, Canada.

• *Silhouettes*, by Alice Ahr, Chapman & Grimes, 30 Winchester Street, Boston, \$1. A collection of traditional metrical lyrics.

• *Rose of Sharon, The Lamb is the Light, and Christ is All*. Three booklets for spiritual contemplation by Edna Janes Kayser, East 3226 South Riverton, Spokane 25, Washington. Also *The Bridegroom Cometh* by Miss Kayser, The Christopher Publishing House, 1140 Columbus Avenue, Boston 20, Massachusetts, \$2. Tender, imaginative portrait of Christ in poetic form.

• *Up-Hill All the Way*; the life of Maynard Shipley, by Miriam Allen DeFord, Yellow Springs, Ohio, Antioch Press, \$4. A warm, but not uncritical biography by his wife. Maynard Shipley had a stirring career (1872-1934) as a Socialist colleague of Debs, opponent of the death penalty, crusader for justice and the rights of men.

• *Garment of Praise*, by Helen Frazee-Bower, Bruce Humphries, Inc., 48 Melrose Street, Boston, Massachusetts, \$2.75. Collections of sonnets and lyrics suitable for all types of Christian services.

• *Look Northward, Man*, by Dana Kneeland Akers, Wings Press, P. O. Box 332, Mill Valley, California, 1957, \$2.50. A collection of poems ranging in subject matter from the North Woods to love, light verse and parody.

• *The Anteroom of Hell*, by William J. Margolis, The Inferno Press, Box 5030 San Francisco, California, \$2. A first book of poems by the editor of *The Miscellaneous Man*; nonconformist, stimulating, controlled verse.

• *The Ina Coolbrith Golden Circle 1957 anthology of poems*, most of them already published, written by members of the famous San Francisco poetry circle. Write for a copy to Miss Eva M. Bradway, President, 950 Franklin Street, San Francisco 9, California.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

• A poem from the Winter STEP LADDER was reprinted in the New York *Herald Tribune* "Week of Verse" on Sunday, March 24: Samuel Sargent's *The City*.

• The editor wishes to announce that the winners of the annual *Jeannette Glover Campbell* prize award for the best poem in the current volume of THE STEP LADDER will be announced in the Summer STEP LADDER, Volume 41, No. 1.

• Announcement is made by the Poet's Club of Chicago of the 4th Annual Sonnet Contest. Send only one, original, unpublished sonnet, any form. Submit 3 copies, bearing title only. Enclose separate sealed envelope containing sonnet title, your name and address. No sonnets returned, except to winners, who retain all rights. Mail to: Miss Isabelle Gillespie Young, 848 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago 40, Illinois. Due date: September 15, 1957. Three prizes: \$20/\$10/\$5.

## THE STEP LADDER CONTRIBUTORS FOR SPRING 1957

Laura Eliza Bliven . . . . .	1 . . . . .	To the Unaware Beloved
William Means . . . . .	2 . . . . .	The Red Caboose
	2-3 . . . . .	The Bridges
Mary Winter . . . . .	4 . . . . .	Prelude / Through the Stereoscope
John Allemande . . . . .	5 . . . . .	On Evolution / On the Madonna
Helen Harrington . . . . .	6-7 . . . . .	The Hunted
Vera T. Marshall . . . . .	8 . . . . .	Answered Prayer
	8 . . . . .	Bridge to Summer
Margaret Ross . . . . .	9 . . . . .	Recall / Dirge for Our Day
Jocelyn Macy Sloan . . . . .	10 . . . . .	So Green My Thoughts
	10 . . . . .	Captive
Emilie Glen . . . . .	11 . . . . .	Mau
Adelaide Long Lawson . . . . .	12 . . . . .	Footfall of Spring
Dorothy Randolph Byard . . . . .	12 . . . . .	Edge of Spring
Willis Eberman . . . . .	13 . . . . .	Premature Spring
Jimm Dakin . . . . .	13 . . . . .	Thoughts Are Lovers
J. Phoenix . . . . .	14 . . . . .	Blue Danube
Ryah Tumarkin Goodman . . . . .	14 . . . . .	This Cool Content
Douglas R. Empringham . . . . .	15 . . . . .	Timorous
Charline Brown . . . . .	15 . . . . .	The Inca Awaits His Ransom
Jeannette Chappell . . . . .	16 . . . . .	Shadowed Water
Warren Kliewer . . . . .	16 . . . . .	Pastoral
Margie B. Boswell . . . . .	17 . . . . .	Words are as Blossoms
Musee A. Brahms . . . . .	17 . . . . .	Abiding in Obscureness
Dora M. Pettinella . . . . .	18 . . . . .	Le Dormeur du Val
	18 . . . . .	Sleeping in the Valley
	19 . . . . .	Peaches Gray Green
Orma McCormick . . . . .	19 . . . . .	Douzet on Death
Joan Angevine Swift . . . . .	20 . . . . .	Black River.
Leona Hamilton . . . . .	20 . . . . .	To Friends, Well Meaning
Paula Nelson . . . . .	21 . . . . .	In Dedication
William Allen Ward . . . . .	21 . . . . .	Desert Lines
Laura Eliza Bliven . . . . .	22-24 . . . . .	The Fifty-Cent Piece
Rose Myra Phillips . . . . .	24 . . . . .	While Writing a Letter
Bernice Ames . . . . .	25 . . . . .	They Call It Gold Mountain
Ella Elizabeth Preston . . . . .	26 . . . . .	With Bluebells / Mountain School
Lucy Price . . . . .	27 . . . . .	Sea Certainty / Notice the Night
Marguerite W. Truslow . . . . .	28 . . . . .	Girl at the Clavichord
	29 . . . . .	Unpublished Item
Anna M. Priestley . . . . .	29 . . . . .	Last Stand
Rachel Graham . . . . .	30 . . . . .	There To Be Known / Dark Dylan
Phyllis Hanson . . . . .	31 . . . . .	Without Farewell
Bookfellow Notes . . . . .	32 . . . . .	



